

How Christmas Came to Newark

THIE merriment and the festivities of Christmas came belatedly in early Newark, but the city has been making up for the lack for over 200 years.

The delay was caused, of course, by the city's puritanical founders. Cotton Mather, dear Puritan divine of Boston, was a great admirer of Newark's first pastor, Rev. Abraham Piereson, whom he referred to as a silver tongued preacher. Mr. Piereson, although the most gentle of men, certainly shared the attitude of Mather and other straight-laced Puritans toward Christmas.

They regarded its observance as a sin and abhorred the gayety that had been associated with it in old England before the Reformation. So we are sure that there could have been no Christmas festivities here for many years after the founding of Newark.

Historians of Newark have concentrated so much on our Puritan heritage that we really know little about any early colonists in this area other than the Connecticut people. There were a few Dutch settlers to the north of the town of Newark—trappers, fur-traders and farmers, who penetrated further and further up the Passaic as the danger of Indian attack lessened.

Coeymans and Van Gletens, Vreeland and Van Duynes, built their homes in the fertile valleys, rearing big families. Did they find time, while laboring hard on their farms, to keep the holiday customs of New Amsterdam? We like to think so. On St. Nicholas Eve, December 6, did the children leave their wooden shoes beside the great brown sandstone "trompeys"? If they did, surely Saint Nikolaus found his way to Second River and Pompton Plains, to Speartown, and to Horseneck, to fill the shoes of the good children with nuts and candies, and to question the bad ones.

BY MIRIAM V. STUDLEY

Puritan Heritage Gave Way to Old World Customs As People of Many Nationalities Settled in City

about their misdeeds in the traditional Dutch manner.

WE know that in New Amsterdam, Christmas Day was not so much a day of gift-giving, but of feasting and entertaining. It was a part of a whole season of holiday merry making, extending from St. Nicholas Day to Three Kings Day, or Twelfth Night. Even though the hardworking Dutch farmers of old Bergen and Essex counties could not indulge in prolonged holidays like the prosperous merchants of New Amsterdam, they had their Christmas feast of roast pig, venison or duck, their nuts and home-made wine.

In the 1740s, across the Passaic at New Barbadoes Neck, guests at the Schuyler mansion, dressed in velvet and satin, drank toasts in imported Madeira, and smoked the finest Virginian tobacco. On Christmas Day they joined the Ogdens, the Kingslands, the Ludlows, the Smyres, and other Episcopalians in services of praise at the newly built Trinity Church, as the bells rang for Christmas in the same tower that overlooks Military Park today.

As Newark grew, its expanding industries attracted the sons of the communities round about, as well as newcomers beginning to arrive from overseas. By the time the city char-



Christmas trees and greens were sold in the vicinity of Old Center Market on Broad street in the 1800s.

ter was granted in 1836, we had about 6,000 Irish, 1,000 English and Scotch, and several hundred Germans. These were enough people of Dutch descent to have established a Dutch Reformed church, and the Roman Catholic Church of St. John in Mulberry street had been in existence for a dozen years.

The people of different nationali-

ties worked side by side in quarries and carriage shops, in shoe makers' and harness makers' establishments, learning to know and to appreciate one another's customs. Sometimes there was unhappy conflict, which the leaders of the community tried hard to overcome.

THE ceremonies and traditions of their church did much to keep up the morale of the Irish who came to this community in such great numbers after 1820. Indeed, so much did the sacraments of their church mean to

the Irish, that before the first priests came to Newark, Catholic parents in Belleville were known to walk all the way to the Hudson River, carrying their babies on their backs, in order that they might be baptized in New York. It was a source of great happiness to Newark Catholics when they could attend midnight mass on Christmas Eve in St. John's Church, dedicated in 1828. Great comfort and joy came to the parishioners of St. John's through the ministrations of Father Moran, who became the fourth pastor in 1833.

He was who secured for St. John's the chime of nine bells, and trained

one of the young men to play them. On midnight of Christmas Eve in 1858, all Newark heard the *Adeste Fideles* ring out from the tower, played by Father Moran himself. Hundreds of Newark's people congregated in the street to listen and the beauty of the chimes was a source of inspiration not only at Christmas but at all seasons.

The tiny church, only 50 by 65 feet at first, was several times enlarged by Father Moran to accommodate the throngs who came to hear the mass at Christmas and other great festival seasons.

This rebuilding was not easy, for the people were poor, and

some could contribute only a penny a week. They had left a homeland impoverished by famine, and they labored here at the heaviest and most roads, and in quarries and track gardens. Father Moran was his own architect, constructing altars and ornaments with his own hands. With what joy and reverence the people listened when the great Christmas music was heard from their first organ, installed in 1849.

THE Episcopalians at Trinity Church had had an organ and organist since 1819, and at the morning services on Christmas Day choir and congregation sang joyously. There was not the great number of Christmas hymns that we have today, but they sang "Oh, Come All Ye Faithful," Nahum Tate's "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night," Dr. Muhlenberg's "Shout the Glad Tidings," and that joyous 18th Century English hymn, "Christians Awake, Salute the Happy Morn!"

By degrees English Christmas customs, abandoned during the Reformation, came to Newark. The singing of the Christmas "waits," was revived in New Jersey, when a group of young



The Sunday school Christmas tree was Yuletide highlight for many children shown marching eagerly to class . . .



Gas-light era had its share of last-minute shoppers and activity around glittering tree on Christmas morning was similar to present-day scenes.

men in Burlington joined in 1853 to go about the streets caroling. They were members of the Burlington Library Company, chartered by King George II in 1758. Together with the choir of old St. Mary's, they waited in the church until the stroke of midnight. As the chimes rang out, the doors opened and the carolers chanted "Gloria in Excelsis." Then, singing Christmas hymns and traditional carols the band visited the rectory, and the homes of friends and parishioners. The custom has been continued in Burlington down through the years, spreading to many other communities.

A variation on the midnight caroling is seen today in the early morning singing by employees of large business houses in Newark, before work on the day before Christmas. Such a practice has been observed at the Newark Library for some 10 years. The memory is vivid; the hush of early morning in the building, the light of many red candles in the marble stairwell, the music of a tiny portable organ and a single stringed instrument accompany the singers; then last, the hearty voice of Beatrice Winser greeting from the third floor.

To the Germans we owe the devel-

opment of the home celebration of Christmas as we know it. Though there were only a few hundred Germans in Newark when we received our city charter, the numbers were vastly increased in the next 30 years, because of wars and revolutions in Europe. A home-loving people, steeped in tradition and folklore, they brought with them Christmas customs, Christmas hymns and Christmas foods.

ALTHOUGH the Dutch and the Germans are alike in making the children the center of St. Nicholas Day or Christmases, the Germans brought us something the Dutch did not then have, the Christmas tree. It is said that the "Tannenbaum" came to America with German immigrants some years before it was known in England.

Newark Germans to whom I have talked describe the Christmas of their childhood in the old country, or here, in very similar fashion. Usually, however, the gifts were not hung on the tree, but were laid on a table or about the base of the tree, bright with candles, gilded nuts and ornaments of gold, silver and tinsel. Ofttimes there were plates set around the base of the

tree to be filled with Christmas delicacies, marzipan, springerle, lebkuchen and pfeffernusse for the children. *Lebkuchen*, there was Christmas gingerbread made in fancy shapes of animals and people.

Gifts among the older German families were mostly confined to the children, the adults exchanging only small remembrances. Among the German Catholics the religious observances were all-important, both here and in Germany. A Christmas Eve supper of fish preceded the great Midnight Mass. The "Shepherd's Mass," followed, in the very early morning hours, although the last has not been so much celebrated in Newark. On Christmas Day there was the big holiday dinner with roast pig, or roast duck and all sorts of good things to accompany them. Christmas afternoon family and friends began the holiday visiting which continued through the next 12 days, until the Feast of the Three Kings. Ready to set before the guests were Christmas cakes of several varieties, wine, coffee and beer. As the guests of the holiday season sat around the tree with its gay decorations, they joined in singing the old familiar carols. It was a season of happy

companionship, of gay reunions of family and friends.

HUNGARIANS, like the Germans, have their Christmas Eve supper of fish, in which eels are an important dish. After this the entire family goes to the Midnight Mass. It is a tradition with the Hungarians not to go to bed on Christmas Eve, but to watch the night out, playing cards, with special decks of cards. If through weariness, one should want to lie down, he must not rest on his bed but on the floor. In the "old country" straw is thrown on the floor for this purpose. A special Christmas Eve cake called the torta is eaten by the Hungarians. It is made of many layers of thinly rolled dough, with honey and poppy or hemp seed. It is said that the layers of dough remind one of the swaddling clothes of the Baby Jesus. In the morning wherever there is a large Hungarian colony, as in Garfield and Passaic, every one goes to the 5 or 6 o'clock "Shepherd's Mass."

Anticipated with keen pleasure at the Yuletide in many Newark families were the holiday issues of *Harpers' Weekly* and *Harpers' Young People*, featuring Thomas Nast's delightful pictures, which appeared over a period of 20 years, beginning in 1862. Bavarian-born Nast was brought to this country as a 6-year-old when his parents fled from Germany in the political upheavals of the 1840s. Among his childhood memories were those of the German Peltz-Nicol, fur-clad and bearded, bringing toys and cakes for the little ones. These memories were the basis for his lovely, imaginative drawings of Santa Claus and of home Christmases.

AMONG the children's stories illustrated by Nast was "Hans Brinker, or the Silver Skates," which Mary Mapes Dodge wrote in Newark. Her vivid account of St. Nicholas Day in Holland, and Clement Moore's "Visits



... and leaving for home with arms full of gifts, happy in thought that their good work had been rewarded.

(Continued from Preceding Page)

from St. Nicholas," combined with Nast's drawings to create the American Santa Claus, that jolly red-dressed figure, decked in fur, bringing his sacks of toys by reindeer express to the rooftops of Newark and a thousand other American cities.

As much a part of the German Christmas as the Tannenbaum was the Christmas manger scene. Coming to Newark as a heritage of many different people, it is known by the French as "Crèche," by the Germans as "Krippe," by the Spanish as "Nacimiento," by the Czechs as "Jeslišky," and by the Italians as "Presepe." Many Americans call it by the Pennsylvania Dutch name "Putz." Always the center of the scene is the little manger with the figure of the Baby Jesus. Grouped around it are statuettes representing the shepherds, the wise men, Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary, angels and animals. From a few tiny crude figures in the poorest homes, to the most elaborate "Putz" representing whole farms and villages, the manger scene remains a dearly loved part of the Christmas observance among many Newark families. They accumulate the makings over the years storing the tiny objects carefully, even preserving them for several generations. Originating in the medieval nativity plays, the "Presepe" was introduced into church services by St. Francis at Greccio, near Assisi in 1223. Thus it is particularly dear to Americans of Italian origin.

ALTHOUGH the Christmas tree was almost unknown to the Italians who came to America from the 1870s on,

it holds first place in their hearts. The whole family shares in planning and arranging the nativity scene which in some homes becomes very elaborate. For days before Christmas the women of the family are also busy preparing the Christmas delicacies, torrone (a sort of hard taffy, almond filled), toasted almonds and sweet cookies often bedecked with gay colored "confetti."

For deeply religious Italians Christmas Eve, with its Midnight Mass, is

NEWARK'S EARLY NOELS



"The Shrine of St. Nicholas," one of Thomas Nast's famous drawings.

the holiest night in the year. The

and Christmas Eve supper includes many traditional dishes. Fish of several kinds is served, calamare (squid), bassa (redfish), capitone (eel) and ostriche (oysters). The eels are particularly delicious, for they are cut up in small sections, dipped in egg and fried in olive oil to a succulent golden brown. With the macaroni main dish, a sauce is served whose base consists of clams and lobsters, or sometimes of anchovies. Greens, especially broccoli or fennel, accompany the

fish, and roasted chestnuts are passed. The dessert is fresh fruit, such as tangerines, apples, grapes and pears, and red wine flows freely.

Like the Hungarians, some Italians play cards all night Christmas Eve. "Il Natale," Christmas Day itself, is a great day of family reunion. Family dinner parties for 30 or 40 people are not unusual. Naturally such a party lasts for hours, for during and between the courses there is much animated conversation and joking, and complimenting the hostesses who have prepared the generous feast and

the attractive decorations. Dinner ends with black coffee and anisette, after which the family divides into groups, the children to play outdoors, the men to smoke and drink in the living room, the women to attack the mountains of dishes and cooking utensils.

THIRTY SEVEN years ago Newarkers from all neighborhoods and all nationalities united in the first of a series of municipal Christmas celebrations. A 40-foot evergreen tree, strong with hundreds of lights was set up on the lawn at the southern end of Military Park. The precedent had been set by New York's great tree in Madison Square in 1912, and by Christmas trees on Boston Common, in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, and in front of the Connecticut State House in Hartford. Many American cities took up the custom in the following years.

Newark's municipal celebration in 1913 was encouraged by club women and the Board of Trade, the cost defrayed by public subscriptions. On Sunday, December 23, 1913, a great song festival took place around the tree. As all the church bells in the city rang, a throng of children assembled in the park, singing carols. After short addresses by Msgr. Patrick Cody, and the Rev. William J. Dawson, there was a sacred band concert and singing by the church choirs.

In the gripping cold of the Saturday previous, the great tree had been dedicated before a large and attentive audience. Band music and hymns led by massed choirs and singing societies highlighted the simple ceremony. Carl Baumhart, presenting the tree to the city, for the sponsoring committee, set the spirit of the celebration as he said, "We meet as a family around the civic hearthstone." Mayor Hausinger, accepting for the city, urged the citizens "not to forget, in the pleasant ending of the old year and the birth of the new, to extend a helping hand to those in adversity."

Bishop Lanes' closing prayer might well be said for Newark today:

"Give us our inheritance of peace and joy and hope; bring in the reign of justice, and mercy, of honesty and purity, and may the peace of God rest upon this great city."



Christmas celebrations centered around "presepe" in Italian homes.



In mission homes children assembled in music room for carol singing.